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S E C R E T SOFIA 001101

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ETTC](#) [ER](#) [ET](#) [BU](#)

SUBJECT: BULGARIA: ANOTHER SCOLDING ON ARMS DEALS

REF: A. BRANDON-FREDEN EMAIL 21 MARCH 2005

[¶](#)B. 04 STATE 141781

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JAMES PARDEW, FOR REASONS 1.4 (A) AND (D).

[¶](#)11. (S) SUMMARY. Bulgarian Deputy Foreign Minister Nikolai Milkov confirmed in a meeting with Ambassador on June 14 that Bulgaria sold 100 T-55 tanks to Eritrea. According to Milkov, the GOB has not approved further military sales to Eritrea after this delivery in 2005 and insisted that the GOB now has a policy of no military equipment sales to Eritrea and Ethiopia. END SUMMARY.

[¶](#)12. (S) Milkov winced when we reminded him of the nonpaper (ref B) given to Bulgaria last year which urged the GOB to use extreme caution in any arms sales to Ethiopia and Eritrea. However, Milkov thanked us for broaching the topic and assured us that this meeting would give the MFA more "ammunition" when fighting to halt such sales in the future. He added the tank sale was pushed through by the Bulgarian Defense Ministry because it could not afford maintenance costs of stored tanks. Milkov said there was no post-sale training or support to Eritrea and no sales of ammunition or spare parts.

[¶](#)13. (S) Ambassador told Milkov that we were surprised that Bulgaria ignored USG advice after seeking our guidance on military sales to this region and disappointed that the GOB did not consult with us before authorizing such a large tank sale. Ambassador further expressed concern at the continued sales from Bulgarian arms brokers that attempt to skirt the GOB's arms export controls through offshore companies and third country equipment. He reminded Milkov of the commitments the GOB has undertaken in various nonproliferation regimes like the Wassenaar Arrangement, and warned that arms deals through Bulgaria to sensitive areas negate the past good work done to better control weapons in the international market.

[¶](#)14. (S) COMMENT: Bulgaria has improved the legal structure of its export controls, however this sale reveals the political and economic pressures to authorize arms sales to its traditional clients in Africa. It highlights once again the tension between Bulgaria's political commitment to international arms control regimes and the economic pressures to allow arms sales to sensitive countries.